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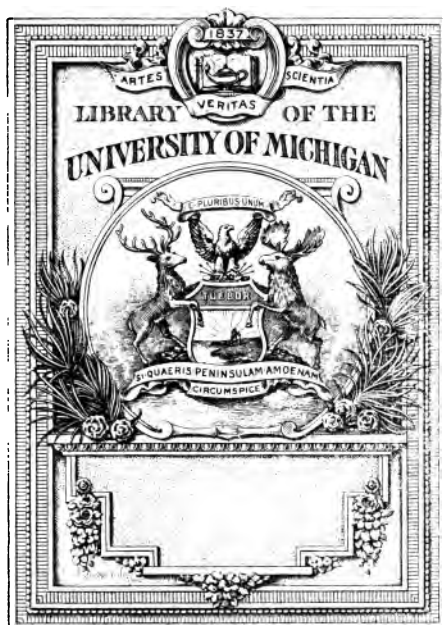
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Bigelow. Reply to  
Brinley on the claims  
of Hon. John P. Bigelow  
as founder of Boston  
Pub. Library

University of Michigan



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*Timothy Bigelow  
Smith Cent. Lib.  
Timothy Bigelow*

REPLY  
OF  
TIMOTHY BIGELOW  
TO  
FRANCIS BRINLEY,  
ON THE CLAIMS OF  
HON. JOHN P. BIGELOW,  
AS  
FOUNDER OF BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

READ BEFORE BOSTON ANTIQUARIAN CLUB, MAY 11, 1880.



REPLY

TO

FRANCIS BRINLEY,

ON THE CLAIMS OF

HON. JOHN P. BIGELOW

AS

FOUNDER OF BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

BY

TIMOTHY BIGELOW.

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READ BEFORE BOSTON ANTIQUARIAN CLUB, MAY 11, 1880.

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BOSTON :  
TOLMAN & WHITE, PRINTERS, 383 WASHINGTON STREET.  
1880.



BOSTON ANTIQUARIAN CLUB,

May 11, 1880.

*Voted,* That the thanks of the Club are tendered to MR. TIMOTHY BIGELOW for his able paper upon the connection of the late HON. JOHN P. BIGELOW, with the origination of the Boston Public Library.

A true copy.

FRED. B. PERKINS,

*Secretary.*

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## REPLY.

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GENERAL QUINCY : —

At the last meeting of this Club, a communication was read by our Secretary, written by Francis Brinley, of Newport, in which he criticised and controverted the claims of HONORABLE JOHN P. BIGELOW to be regarded as the Founder of the Boston Public Library, so far as the idea of giving a certain fund, known as the Bigelow Donation, was original with himself. And it is, *prima facie*, a strange proceeding to find an ex-official, who must have passed, or is in the immediate vicinity of, his eighty-second life mile-stone, undertaking to assail the reputation of one to whom he confesses to have been, for a long time, “a familiar and trusted friend”; and doing this, too, eight years after he, who might have replied to his charges and criticisms, has passed from sight. But, as “politics make strange bed-fellows,” so, likewise, do the experiences and familiarities of life; and what a peculiar friend Francis Brinley must have been to John P. Bigelow, it will be the purport of this paper to prove.

It is natural to ask: Why did not Mr. Brinley, who is so anxious to purify the Castalian Springs of history, make public years ago, over his own name, the statements which we recently listened to, when scores of people were living who might have replied thereto, all of whom are now sought for in vain? Our newspapers are ever open to receive clear and candid statements of facts, especially all such as concern the early history of so great and popular an institution as our City Library; and such data as Mr. Brinley had to divulge, either to the news-monger of the past, or the news-digester of the future, ought to have been published when they were fresh and provable. But, no: he waits till death has harvested many a ripened sheaf, and then sends his treasured secrets, — to whom? Why, to the Secretary of a new and local organization, who chances, at the same time, to have charge of an

important Chapter in the forthcoming Centennial History of Boston. It is to the honor of being a member of this Club, that I am able to know accurately what has been alleged, and present answers thereto; and it will appear, I think, clearly in the context that, if Mr. Frederic B. Perkins had relied implicitly on Mr. Brinley's assertions for facts, there would have been some egregious blunders in his valuable Chapter.

What, briefly, is the substance of Mr. Brinley's communication? He quotes, or inserts, a printed correspondence between a certain Executive Committee on the "Bigelow Vase," so called, and John P. Bigelow: next, he details what was done at a meeting of the subscribers to the same Vase, called and held "at the time," with a whispered dialogue between Major Ben. Perley Poore and himself: next, he charges that a certain inscription, which he carefully composed, was essentially altered before being engraved: next, he cites Deacon Moses Grant, as engaged in "an attempt to strengthen the decrepit claim of Mr. Bigelow," in connection with the establishment of the Library: next, he introduces, with undisguised satisfaction, an unjust and inconsequential editorial from the Boston Daily Advertiser, on a banquet in Mr. Bigelow's honor, at the Tremont House, January 28, 1864: and concludes, by denying that at any time he has claimed the credit of having founded the Public Library; then, he "thinks" sufficiently "loud" to name Lemuel Shattuck as its "original projector"; then, he agrees with the Advertiser that "the Public Library is the creature of the public"; and, at last, by introducing a certain communication from the Boston Journal of March 20, 1854, and thus making it part of his own paper, he does claim emphatically that Francis Brinley was "perhaps the originator" of the Library, and it "was certainly his original project."

One statement made in this communication in the Journal should be emphasized. It is therein asserted that the resolution which Mr. Brinley offered, at a certain meeting of the subscribers to the "Bigelow Vase," "was the origin of the action which has resulted in that great public boon," *i.e.*, the Public Library. No wonder that Col. William W. Clapp, more than twenty-six years ago, in the Evening Gazette, called Mr. Brinley's amount of credit "a small share to claim"; while we have the admission that Mr. Bigelow's \$1,000 gift was really the origin of the Library. For Mr. Brinley's labors in its behalf are bounded by this one act, or

fact, as he expresses it, — that he “took pen and paper, and hurriedly wrote a resolution.” In the volume detailing the proceedings at the laying the corner-stone of the Library, the names of 253 book donors are printed; and while Mr. Bigelow had presented 453 books and 624 pamphlets (sometimes more valuable than books) the name of Francis Brinley does not appear at all. And in the larger list of 414 similar contributors, in the volume describing the exercises at the completion of the building, Mr. Brinley does not appear as one who had given so much as a tract or treatise to the institution which he claims to have originated. Therefore, it is by the part taken by him at meetings of the subscribers to the “Bigelow Vase,” that his title to honor, in connection with our Public Library, consists; and simply because he wrote a certain resolution, we are assured that he is worthy of mention and praise from historian and scribe.

One obvious question confronts us at the outset. What if Francis Brinley did “write and present” a resolve at a meeting of the “Bigelow Vase” subscribers? Did that make him the originator of the Library? Whose was the money that was thus to be appropriated? Who was to say, — whose wishes were to be consulted, — as to how the sums, which had been contributed for a deserved personal testimonial, should be applied? Obviously, not Francis Brinley, but John P. Bigelow. The money was Mr. Bigelow’s, and absolutely at his disposal. It was for this gentleman to comply, or not, with any suggestion or resolve of those who wished to do him honor; all the while, he had but to reach out his hand and accept their proffered offering, for that, and that alone, was the thought of the subscribers. The money, we repeat, was Mr. Bigelow’s; and as it will appear that his action in not receiving a Vase was one of marked magnanimity and self-denial, it deserved to be, as it was, attended with great issues. But to claim that Francis Brinley’s resolution, and not John P. Bigelow’s donation, was the corner-stone of the Library, is so shallow a pretence that its fallacy is obvious.

Mr. Brinley’s communication to this Club was confessedly written to make Mr. Perkins’ Chapter, in the prospective Centennial History, “scrupulously correct,” and, for this purpose, he contributes what he calls “simple facts.” Listen to some of the “simple facts” which he has compounded!

We are told: “During the mayoralty of Mr. Bigelow, Mr.

Prince, now Mayor of Boston, resided in the town of Winchester, and would not be likely to know all the intricacies of Boston politics." Now, to say that Mayor Prince, whose law office has always been under the shadows of City Hall, where his busy, studious, honorable life has been passed, knew nothing of Boston politics in 1849-50 because, when evening came, he steamed over eight miles of railroad in some seventeen minutes, is as absurd as to assert that your illustrious Grandfather, — Hon. Josiah Quincy, — was unfamiliar with Boston politics and public affairs, during the more than sixteen years that he was President of Harvard University, and a resident of Cambridge. For Frederick O. Prince, Boston-born, Boston-bred, and Boston-blooded, as he is, took as instinctively to politics of all kind, municipal, state and national, as a lark to the sky, or robins to a fruited cherry tree. Why, he was in the political field at so early an age that he became Secretary of the National Democratic Committee, itself, so long ago that the "memory of some men runneth not to the contrary." It is not impossible that it was this precocious devotion to politics, on the part of our estimable Chief Magistrate, which has made his moustache so much more venerable than his years would warrant.

No, sir! Frederick Octavius Prince had politics of all kind so inherent in his very life-essence, that he would have been familiar with every thing transpiring under, or connected with, our City Hall if, instead of living in that Winchester only a few miles from Boston, he had resided in the historic town of the same name, where once

" Louder yet into Winchester rolled  
The roar of that red sea uncontrolled ;"

or if he had passed long time near the famous Norman tower and venerable cathedral of the Winchester in Hampshire County, Old England, instead of Winchester, Middlesex County, New England.

But, aside from the general absurdity of Mr. Brinley's statement, there are two reasons why it is not true : (1) Until July, 1850, which covers the period that now interests us, Mayor Prince lived at 23 Chambers street, Boston, according to the Directory, which had been his continuous residence from the time when his name first appeared therein, in 1839. (2) Till April 30, 1850, there was no Winchester, Massachusetts, for Mayor Prince or any one else to dwell in—that being the date of its incorporation as a town !

"In the year 1849," says Mr. Brinley, "I was President of the Common Council." Wrong! Wretchedly wrong! For, in 1849, the Hon. Benjamin Seaver, — afterwards Mayor, — a modest, able and popular citizen, was President of the Common Council, and a very acceptable presiding officer he was. "Not sitting up like an owl," as a certain other official, who once held the same place, was described to me as doing, by a very distinguished member of the Common Council who served under his presidency.

In an alleged conversation with Mr. Bigelow, after his receipt of the letter dated December 18, 1849, which appears on one of Mr. Brinley's printed slips, we are told by this gentleman that he objected to the Vase-fund being given to a Hospital, "principally, because the Common Council had recently voted against such an establishment." It is safe to assume, — since the subscribers to the "Bigelow Vase" had a thorough business gentleman for Secretary, — that the letter in question reached Mayor Bigelow on the day of its date, or the day following; and as, on its receipt, we are informed that he had an interview with Mr. Brinley, this conversation must have occurred, presumably, on December 19th or 20th. Now, previous to this last date, no vote whatever on the Hospital project had been taken by the Common Council: and so far from the plan having been voted against, on this same day, December 20, 1849, it being a special meeting, the Board of Aldermen voted in its favor, by five yeas to three nays; and a week later, — December 27th, — after what was termed "a brief, but spirited discussion," all documents relating to a City Hospital were referred to the next Common Council. But even this non-committal vote occurred too late to have been used as an argument, at Mr. Brinley's assumed interview with Mayor Bigelow.

The other alleged plea at this same colloquy, — that the "subscribers to the Vase were scattered throughout the city, and, in calling them together, there would be great labor and expense," — is equally fallacious; for the meeting of the subscribers, at which Mr. Brinley's resolutions, — not resolution, — were adopted, was one that had been adjourned to the specific evening on which it was held. Therefore, it was anticipated; while the "*great labor and expense*" of calling that, or any other meeting, consisted in printing and mailing sundry brief notices.

We are told by Mr. Brinley, after the passage of his resolution, "the next day, when I met Mr. Bigelow, he manifested great

dissatisfaction." Now it is a fact, proved by the Record Book of the subscribers to the "Bigelow Vase," which record was carefully kept by Daniel Sharp, Secretary, that the meeting at which it was determined that the Vase-fund should be placed at Mr. Bigelow's disposal, "for the purpose of aiding in the establishment of a Free Public Library," was held on Saturday evening, February 2, 1850. "The next day" would, consequently, have been Sunday; and as Mayor Bigelow was an habitual attendant, both morning and afternoon, at Rev. Dr. Frothingham's Church, on what was then known as Chauncy place, it is morally certain that Mr. Bigelow's next interview with Francis Brinley was not on the day following the passage of his resolutions. More than this, it will appear in the sequel that Mr. Bigelow, probably, had very good reason to be dissatisfied with what his "friend" Brinley had done, when their next meeting did occur.

"Soon after this," we are informed, "the long-continued friendship of Mr. Bigelow and myself came to an end." Assuming as an established fact already mentioned, and one *not* found in Mr. Brinley's communication, that this date was a few days after February 2, our communicator's definition, or use, of the word "soon," is somewhat faulty, he evidently being more familiar with Boswell's Johnson, than Johnson's Dictionary. Because, on May 20, 1850, Francis Brinley signed his name to a paper, wherein he testified his "respect for Mr. Bigelow, as a man and a magistrate"; and on August 12, 1850, he was a special messenger from Mayor Bigelow to Henry Clay, then at Newport, bearing an official letter inviting the great statesman to visit Boston; and on August 28, of the same year, he presided at a meeting at Faneuil Hall, and advocated the nomination of John P. Bigelow for Governor of Massachusetts! Mr. Brinley's friendship must have been alive at this time, — probably.

Mr. Brinley speaks of having an original letter of Mr. Bigelow in his possession, "dated December 18, 1849." Now this is the identical letter printed on a newspaper cutting, with which Mr. Brinley favored us, where it is dated "January 7, 1850." This may be called a slip of the pen, but a gentleman who is furnishing facts for history, and who, from his extended quotations from this very letter, probably has it lying on the desk before him while preparing his communication, has no right to make such a mistake, small though it be.

Let me call attention to another statement of Mr. Brinley respecting this same letter. We are told "Mr. Sharp gave it to me, as appears by my endorsement thereon." Since Mr. Sharp says that he has no recollection of having given this, or any correspondence about the "Bigelow Vase," to Francis Brinley,—having no right, as Secretary, to do so, or to part with any official document,—I am naturally reminded, by Mr. Brinley's self-proof, of the picture of John P. Squibob, in that once popular work, "*Phoenixiana*," beneath which was this autograph :

"Yours respectfully,

JOHN P. SQUIBOB."

To this, was annexed the following note :

"This autograph may be relied on as authentic, as it was written by one of Mr. Squibob's most intimate friends."

Mr. Brinley speaks of "the resolution which was passed by the City Council on the death of Mr. Bigelow." Now, on the resignation of John P. Bigelow, as Trustee of the Library, in 1869,—he having served seventeen continuous years in that capacity, being a member of the first Board of Trustees elected,—three Resolutions were passed by the Board of Aldermen, and the last one affirmed "that Mr. Bigelow has well earned the title of the founder of the Public Library of the City of Boston, and as such he must always be recognized, respected and remembered." These Resolutions were printed in the city newspapers of January 26, and in due course were passed unanimously by the Common Council, after an able and sympathetic speech in their favor by Hon. James M. Keith, who had served as an associate Trustee with Mr. Bigelow. At this time, if ever, exception should have been taken to this public municipal endorsement of Mr. Bigelow's claims in connection with the origin of the Library, provided they were faulty ; and then, if ever, Mr. Brinley should have discharged his Parthian arrows, from the vicinage of the old Bishop Berkley Church. But the archer's arm was unraised : while more than three years later, on occasion of Mr. Bigelow's death, July 6, 1872, the City Council resolved that it "gratefully remembers and recognizes the valuable and timely aid which he rendered in the early days of the establishment of the Public Library of the City of Boston" ; and, thereupon, were ratified, or reaffirmed, the Resolutions of 1869. And at this



time, likewise, no dissenting murmurs came from Narragansett Bay.

Since Mr. Brinley is so fond of, and familiar with, Samuel Johnson, from whom he quoted, it were well that he should have recollected what the great lexicographer wrote to Dr. Burney, to this effect: "Of the caution necessary in adjusting narratives, there is no end. Some tell what they do not know, that they may not seem ignorant, and others from indifference about truth. A writer should keep himself vigilantly on his guard against the first temptations to negligence or supineness."

With this review of certain surface errors in Mr. Brinley's communication, I am glad to bear testimony to one statement which has a presumption of correctness in its favor. He writes: "I carefully composed the form of an inscription for the salver." The presumption of verity, in this instance, is predicated on the fact that the Resolutions in favor of devoting the Vase-fund towards a Library were passed February 2, 1850, as already known; and the testimonial engraved on the silver salver was not signed till May 20; and nearly one-third part of a year would seem to afford sufficient time in which to "compose carefully" an inscription which makes less than seven printed lines!

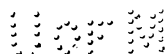
As Mr. Brinley pompously speaks of this as his "manuscript," it deserves, of course, special mention; though the concluding part of the last quoted sentence,—to the effect that the inscription prepared by himself "contained, in a condensed form, all the facts,"—is not correct, nor borne out by the records, or the salver on which it was engraved. For there are no facts, condensed or uncondensed, thereon, other than that it was presented to Mr. Bigelow for his noble conduct in declining a costly Vase, and in appropriating the money, obtained for that purpose, to the founding of a Free Public Library. But this inscription will require specific notice, at a later time in this communication; together with Mr. Brinley's startling charge respecting its alteration before reaching the engraver.

As so much reference has been, and, necessarily, must be, made to the "Bigelow Vase Fund," so called, it is proper to state fully, and now, for what purpose and by whom that Fund was contributed. In a word, it is important to explain what the Advertiser, sneeringly, and with autocratic *hauteur*, terms "the history of this precious thousand dollars."

The year 1849 was what is known and remembered as the "Cholera Year." By a fortunate coincidence, at the first advent of this wild, weird, deadly traveller from Hindostan in 1832, John P. Bigelow was President of the Common Council, and an able coadjutor of the then Mayor,—Hon. Charles Wells,—in devising and administering those methods, both of prevention and cure, which were so effective that, as a commission of physicians, consisting of Drs. Warren, Bigelow, Shattuck, Hayward and Ware, stated in print,—“While in each of the large cities of the United States some thousands of inhabitants were swept off by the ravages of cholera, it was found that all the deaths which occurred in Boston from the disease, during its epidemic presence, hardly amounted to eighty in number.”

Instructed by this valuable official experience, Mayor Bigelow, in assuming the duties of office, on January 1, 1849, warned the members of the City Council “of the mysterious pestilence which has traversed the Eastern Hemisphere, and again threatens to invade our precincts”; whereupon, the City Government did, rigidly and righteously, “set its house in order,” fitting up a large building on Fort Hill—by an ominous fatality formerly used by the Columbian Artillery as a gun-house—for a cholera hospital. And the death-dealing visitant, thus looked for and prepared for,—*came!* The first fatal case was at 11 Hamilton street, June 3, and the last one at the inauspicious “gun-house,” September 30. During this time, 611 deaths occurred in Boston. In one week,—that ending August 18,—111 fatal cases were reported, that being the maximum of mortality from cholera alone; at the same time, deaths from cognate diseases were frightfully large,—the mortuary record for the year being far in advance of anything then known in our goodly city.

But it was not in the “gun-house” alone that deaths from cholera took place,—where it may be said, in passing, that 96 patients recovered out of 262 admitted,—for the strides of this deadly, stealthy Titan were in all portions of the city. While the newspapers contained this sad recital, “Patrick Crowe, aged 19, died at the hospital, Fort Hill, on Tuesday night [July 17], making the eighth of the same family who have died of the cholera. The whole family were very worthy people.” They also had items like the following: “Mrs. Annie Frances Thayer, aged 33, wife of John E. Thayer, Esq., who resides at 64 Mt. Vernon street,



died on Friday [June 22], after an illness of four or five days. Dr. Bigelow pronounced her disease to be cholera." Thus Beacon Hill echoed back the cries that went up from Fort Hill and Copp's Hill, and a just feeling of apprehension and peril filled and thrilled all the avenues and dwellings of Boston.

It was at this period of death and danger, that Mayor Bigelow more than rose to the requirements and calls of his high office, and discharged his trying duties in a manner at once bold, energetic and Christian. He was busy in season and out of season, "visiting in person many of the localities where originated some of the worst cases" (I quote from the valuable and voluminous report of Dr. Henry G. Clark, made to the City Government), initiating all possible and practicable methods of prevention and relief; and he gave no rest to his eyelids, and none to feet or pulsating brain, so long as a peril remained which human or humane agency could avert.

Why, Sir, it was his wont to rise at three or four o'clock in the morning, and repair to the spots of special danger and thickest disease in the city, personally superintending all needful and effective remedies; and farther, still, those tireless feet (so long as a duty remained undischarged) would tramp to the charnel-house on Fort Hill, there to minister, patiently and sympathetically, to the suffering and death-smitten,—receiving the last messages of the dying, when friends and familiars were necessarily afar,—and doing what he could ill-afford, from slender personal means, for the living who were dear to those thus sadly snatched away. It was because John P. Bigelow, in this fearful death crash and crisis, did not only all that became a magistrate and a man, but acted more like a Christian warrior, who carries his life in hand in the execution of every known and perilous duty, that a general feeling of security existed among all classes of citizens; and they slept more safely, more peacefully, because "the man for the hour" had come, and it was certain that no death-bell would toll in the Puritan City, which forethought, energy and vigilance might avert. Others were calm and hopeful, because the Father of the City was ever on the watch and move.

It was when the fever of fear which the cholera awakened had well nigh abated, and the public pulse beat anew with the throbs of hope and health, on the 23d day of October, 1849,—being twenty-three days before the cholera hospital was finally closed,—that a



company of prominent citizens of Boston assembled at the Albion Hotel, to testify their respect for Mr. Bigelow, and devise a personal testimonial representing their gratitude and regard. In the words of the record, as kept by Mr. Sharp,—in a bold handwriting, creditable to John Hancock himself,—“the meeting was held by a number of the citizens of Boston and vicinity, desirous of making some suitable demonstration to the Hon. John P. Bigelow, for his vigilant and unremitting efforts to stay the progress of the cholera in the city of Boston, and for the generally judicious course pursued by him, in his official capacity.” It was, therefore, when the city was laying aside its robes of sackcloth for garments of joy, that this demonstration was initiated; or, rather, as when the Catholic Church removes the emblems of woe at the close of Lent, for the flowers and vestments of Easter Sabbath, that this gathering occurred.

And who were these gentlemen whom the Advertiser, inferentially and unjustly, stigmatizes as “liquor-dealers”? *Facile princeps*, ROBERT G. SHAW, then, and at subsequent meetings, the Chairman, assuredly one of Boston’s best and most honored merchants and citizens, whose position, confessedly, in the guilds of merchants, ranks him with the Medici and Greshams of history: Benjamin Seaver, whose name alone tells his honorable story and *status*: Jonathan P. Robinson, a merchant on Commercial Wharf, and one of the founders and first Directors of Eliot Bank: Col. John L. Dimmock, President of Warren Insurance Company: Samuel G. Reed, President of Grocers’ Bank: Hon. Samuel D. Crane: Hon. J. Putnam Bradlee: Hon. David K. Hitchcock: Darwin E. Jewett: Willard A. Harrington: Col. Henry C. Brooks: Solomon Carter, head of the great house of Carter, Harris & Hawley: Paul Adams: Hon. Albert Bowker: Major Ben. Perley Poore: Daniel N. Haskell: Hon. Nathaniel Seaver, Jarvis D. Braman, Francis Richards, James Whiting and Josiah Dunham,—all of whom were subsequently City Aldermen: Isaiah Faxon: Isaac Danforth: R. W. Holman: Rev. Joseph Banvard: and, as has been stated already, Daniel Sharp. Where in this list, which I have purposely made large in order to prove the quality of citizenship which it contained, can any catering to what is called the “liquor interest” be found? A most careful study of the eight members composing the Executive Committee, of the thirty-two names of the Committee appointed in each Ward to procure

subscriptions, together with all others who took part at the meetings, reveals but one person who, according to the Directory, sold ale and liquors, while one was a distiller, John Felton.

Mr. Sharp records that "the Hon. Robert G. Shaw, on taking the chair at the first meeting, fully explained its object, and stated many interesting facts which had come under his observation in regard to the services of the Mayor during the year." At a later meeting, as the Subscription Committee rendered their returns, Paul Adams said that "the amount he had paid to the Treasurer had been collected in small sums"; as did Nathaniel Seaver, F. F. Raymond, J. M. Wright, and others; which proved how spontaneously the offerings came from the people themselves, as well as the high place which Mayor Bigelow had won in their confidence and esteem. The subscriptions were large, and increasing daily, so that more than \$2,400 were pledged to procure a silver Vase, or, as the alternative was afterwards proffered to Mr. Bigelow, "a service of plate of the same value and material"; and it was to ascertain the Mayor's wishes as to which he would prefer, that the letter of December 18, 1849, was written. And this necessarily brings me back to the consideration of Mr. Brinley's method of stating "simple facts," and his "scrupulous accuracy."

We are informed that "a meeting of the subscribers was called and held at the Albion, at which the above correspondence was read." Now, I have "interviewed" every person who can be found of those who attended the various Albion meetings, and I have yet to see the first man who recollects hearing the reply of Mr. Bigelow, dated January 7, 1850, read or considered. In fact, they say, without exception, that such letter never was read or acted upon; and I have specially consulted those who were comparatively young at the time, and whose memories would be the more accurate as to what transpired. Neither do the records make any mention of the Mayor's letter, though therein is transcribed the Committee's letter of December 18, to which it was a reply. As far, then, as such a fact can be proved at this late day, the letter that we are considering was never laid before the subscribers, at all; and other circumstances connected with this epistle, — which Mr. Brinley has so carefully preserved, and so carelessly given to us, so far as the date of its appearing in print is concerned, — prove that after it was published, there was no action to be taken thereon, because the work of the subscribers had been concluded, except to discharge their unpaid amounts.

When would it logically be inferred, from what Mr. Brinley writes, that the letters were printed, which appear in his first newspaper excerpt? The Advertiser's editorial on the Tremont House banquet, which he favors us with, bears a date; as does the communication in the Journal, in Francis Brinley's praise as the veritable founder of the Library. But this particular slip, so far as concerns the time when it was printed, was dateless. We are told that a "meeting was called and held," and I inferred, at the time the Newport missive was read, it occurred very soon after Mr. Bigelow's letter was written.

Not so! For the two letters (and I dwell more emphatically on the fact, since I had to search long and carefully among dusty newspapers at the Athenæum to ascertain it), were printed in the Boston Daily Atlas, Tuesday, February 5, 1850! While that meeting of the Vase subscribers at the Albion, at which Mr. Brinley presented three Resolutions,—instead of one,—and when Major Ben. Perley Poore, so far from "quietly speaking" to Mr. Brinley alone, made an open, vigorous speech, advocating the donation of the fund towards a Library,—took place, Saturday, February 2, at which time, final action was had on the disposal of the Vase-money. Beside Mr. Sharp's record, Major Poore writes me that this meeting occurred on "Saturday evening"; and since the only two meetings, when the question of Library or Hospital was discussed, were January 16, which was Wednesday, and February 2, which was Saturday, it is certain that this last was the true date when, if ever, Mr. Brinley's whisperings occurred. And to verify verity itself, as it were, in the matter, I have seen one of the printed notifications of this meeting, which bears date February 1, and reads: "You are requested to meet at the Albion, at 7, tomorrow evening." As we thus know the precise time at which Mr. Brinley's Resolutions were adopted, it follows that it was only the second secular day thereafter, that the correspondence appeared in the Atlas.

Let me here call attention to this Hospital letter of Mr. Bigelow, because of certain noteworthy facts connected therewith. Where the missive was, from the day of its writing, till the wondrously slow-footed Ganymede, arm-in-arm with the God of Mis-rule himself, left it at the Atlas printing office, on Franklin avenue, no one knows. Doubtless, Mr. Bigelow had given it to some "familiar and trusted friend," to be handed by him to the Executive

Committee, and it is certainly probable that the recipient was one of that Committee, of whom four are dead, and, of the survivors, three have told me that they never, to their remembrance, saw it, had it, or heard of it! Two facts, only, can be accurately stated about this puzzling letter. It required thirty days, less one, for it to travel from 11 Temple street (Mayor Bigelow's residence), to the Atlas office; and after thirty years, the original is in the possession of Mr. Brinley, at Newport, who has had it in his keeping all the time!

The only explanation which I can arrive at, regarding this remarkable letter, is the following: As has been previously stated, the matter of a City Hospital had been referred by the City Council of 1849, to that of 1850, and, in its establishment, Mr. Bigelow was warmly and naturally interested, knowing, as he did—as had been made plain by his cholera experience—how much such an institution was needed by the respectable poor of Boston. The date of the letter was identical with the day on which the new City Government for 1850 was inaugurated; and, doubtless, it was the thought of the Mayor that, by thus donating the Vase-fund, he might vitalize a great public boon. While such disposal of the money was a legitimate sequence of the committee's own letter to Mr. Bigelow, in which they commended his "judicious and manly conduct as Mayor during the current municipal year, especially during the lamentable prevalence of the cholera." On the spur of quickened sensibilities, it is natural that the Hospital letter was written and given to a trusted friend, as well as a member of the Executive Committee, who shall be nameless. But upon Mr. Bigelow discovering that there would be opposition to a Hospital appropriation of the fund, he must have directed that the letter should not be presented to the subscribers, and, in fact, countermanded it. For, at the meeting of January 16, Mr. Robinson reported that "the committee appointed to wait upon the Mayor had no official communication to make from Mr. Bigelow," which would not have been true if the January 7th letter had not been revoked and its delivery forbidden. For the Hospital proposal meeting with opposition, Mr. Bigelow at once fell back upon the Library project, which had, for a long time, been familiar to him.

On these *data*, it is legitimate to return to Mr. Brinley's "next day" interview with Mr. Bigelow, "when he manifested great dissatisfaction," and was "urged to be quiet," "to be silent," etc.

Now, assuredly, this would have been excellent advice to give the Mayor of Boston, provided he was making a public disturbance on any day, and especially the holy Sabbath! But as Mr. Brinley's "next day" is to be regarded in the light of a "movable feast," is it not all but certain that the alleged stormy interview, between Mr. Bigelow and the then President of the Common Council, occurred after the interdicted letter had been printed in the Atlas, when, obviously, the Mayor was justifiable in "manifesting great dissatisfaction?"

It is proper to emphasize Mr. Bigelow's magnanimity in declining a costly service of plate,—and converting the money collected for the object to promote a great public charity or boon. For his private means were small; his salary was \$2,500; and a gift which, had he consented to receive it, would almost have equalled a whole year's stipend in silver, was virtually returned to the donors, with the request, as will soon be shown, that the money be used in the establishment of a Library. Assuredly, instead of a "once trusted and familiar friend" endeavoring, at this late day, to point out some peccadillo in the services and record of a great and popular civic magistrate, it would better become him, as the shadows of evening are closing round, to indicate how noble, how illustrious, an act it was on the part of Mayor Bigelow, when he presented the first money contribution in behalf of the Library; though, by so doing, he acted directly contrary to our communicator's advice, as appears by his paper.

John P. Bigelow required no hurriedly penned resolution, or resolutions, of Francis Brinley—at as late a day as February 2, 1850—to remind him how much a Free City Library was required in Boston. No, indeed! For Mr. Bigelow was, as the late Mayor Shurtleff has said, the person most familiar with statistics, and the best read man on all topics, State or municipal, whom he ever knew. It follows, that Mr. Bigelow was familiar with what your honored Father said in his Inaugural Address of January 3, 1848, to this effect: "I would call your attention as to the advisability of asking the Legislature for power of aiding public spirited citizens in the formation of a Library, under as few restrictions as is consistent with the preservation of the property."

Nor was Mr. Bigelow ignorant that, on September 22, 1849, Daniel N. Haskell,—himself a subscriber to the "Bigelow Vase," as before named,—presented a report to the Common Council relative



to the books returned to Paris, in requital for A. Vattermare's gifts to Boston, in which he stated: "These books possess a value to your Committee far beyond the immediate object for which they have been collected. They are a noble response from the community in favor of a Free City Library, — an object which has engaged the attention of many of our best citizens. The rare and valuable works received from Paris are a nucleus, around which we earnestly hope a new and popular institution will speedily arise, which shall open its doors to the public."

While Mr. Bigelow showed officially that he was fully aware of the need of a City Library when, under date of October 31, 1849, he wrote to Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, in acknowledging certain volumes of "bound public documents," and thanked him for his "contribution to our (*in esse*) free Library, it being the first American stone contributed in that behalf," with the assurance that "Gov. Everett promises a large contribution, so that with you and him the enterprise is already in successful progress."

But aside from these general *data* illustrating Mr. Bigelow's knowledge of, and interest in, a Free Public Library, it was well known to that gentleman's family and familiars that, from his induction to office, he was emphatic in urging the commencement of a Library, and saying before he left office, the city must have such an institution. Mr. Bigelow, while Mayor, frequently visited his aged Mother at Medford, and there he spoke freely and fully of a future City Library. And when the proposed Vase was first mentioned, he stated that he should donate the money for a Library. My informant is Col. Francis R. Bigelow, the sole surviving brother of John P. Bigelow, who adds that he never heard of a Hospital.

Ex-Alderman Nathaniel Seaver, of East Boston, who collected the largest amount of any member of the Subscription Committee, — his returns being one-fourth of the gross amount (\$1,291), — tells me that he heard Mr. Bigelow, very early after becoming Mayor, talk about a Library, long before a Vase was thought of, or initiated. He also says, "it was always Library, never heard of Hospital." Mr. Seaver has kindly written me to this effect: "The subject [of the Library] was one he was interested in, and often, when I met him, I would make inquiries of him in regard to the progress of the Library, and he would communicate to me such information as he had. I often met Mr. Robinson with your Uncle, and they were both enthusiastic on the subject of a Library."

Dr. Hitchcock, who was Mayor Bigelow's most intimate and trusted friend,—and such a one as it is a sacred privilege to form in life,—remembers very early in his municipal career, that the Mayor was frequently speaking of a Library; that one must be established before quitting office; and he never heard of a Hospital, or, at least, so little about one, that the subject has wholly passed from memory.

To all this, I may be permitted to bear my own testimony, having special cause for doing so: for, from June 11th, 1849, my kinsman lived at 11 Temple street, as stated previously, my Father's residence being 3 Hancock street,—only a block apart; and it was the exception, not the rule, when a day passed without seeing my Uncle, either at his own home, or my Father's. Even while the cholera was at its height, the topic of a future Library was always under discussion, and an object of familiar and frequent inquiry, so that it was an oft-repeated question,—long before the close of 1849,—“ Well, Uncle John, how comes on your Library?”

I recur, now, to the evidence of Mr. Sharp's records, to ascertain how far the idea of donating the Vase money to a Library was original with Francis Brinley, as well as to prove what he wrote himself at the time concerning Mr. Bigelow's claims to be regarded as its founder or originator. This evidence is decisive, as to the Mayor's wishes and sentiments; and proves that, while declining any selfish personal gift, he studied to conserve and advance the public good.

A meeting of the Vase subscribers was, as we know, held at the Albion, Wednesday, January 16, 1850, at which time the Executive Committee, by J. P. Robinson, reported as follows: “ That on the 18th of December, they addressed a letter to Hon. J. P. Bigelow, a copy of which they now offer. The committee are not ready to report an official communication from Mr. Bigelow, but they are satisfied, from interviews they have had with him, that he will not accept either a Silver Vase, or a Service of Plate of such value as you have directed us to offer. The Mayor, in referring to our letter of the 18th of December, stated that he had felt the need of a Free City Hospital during the year last past, and that a fund for such an institution, once started, would readily be increased. He also referred to the establishment of a Free Public Library, and stated that many wealthy citizens, who had the welfare of the City of Boston at heart, would contribute both books and funds, if

such an institution were established. Mr. Robinson stated that, in their interview with Mr. Bigelow, he gave them unmistakable evidence of his most affectionate appreciation of the kindness of his friends at this time.

Mr. Brinley, of the committee, stated that the humane disinterestedness of Mr. Bigelow, as he expressed his sentiments to members of the Executive Committee, has increased his claims to our confidence and regard. Mr. Brinley thought Mr. Bigelow favored the establishment of a Hospital for the relief of our respectable poor, who have no sufficient refuge in sickness but the almshouse, and this was a good object, no doubt. But that he believed there were serious objections to a Hospital in the minds of gentlemen present, and others interested in the fund subscribed and paid in.

Dr. Hitchcock said the Mayor, while entertaining the kindest and most grateful feelings towards those who so generously contributed towards the proposed Vase, felt he must decline to receive it; at the same time, he would like to give the money for a Hospital, or towards the establishment of a Free Public Library. *He was particularly emphatic in speaking of the Library*, and stated that Abbott Lawrence would give ten thousand dollars to the object, besides the assurance of a larger donation in books and money from other sources.

The matter was farther discussed, and the feeling seemed to be to leave the whole matter in the hands of the Executive Committee, to appropriate the funds collected as Mr. Bigelow will be satisfied with, and as their judgment will approve.

Adjourned, to meet at the Albion, February 2d."

The record of this adjourned meeting is as follows:—

*February 2d, 1850.*

"A public meeting of the subscribers to the Bigelow Fund, was held at the Albion this evening,—Hon. Robert G. Shaw, presiding. Francis Brinley, Esq., offered the following, after having in detail given an account of the progress made by the friends of the Mayor, in subscribing to procure some solid testimonial of the grateful service entertained by them of his public services during the last municipal year:—

*Resolved*, That we highly appreciate the humane disinterestedness of Mr. Bigelow, in honor of whom we have contributed from

our means, and that the sentiments expressed to the Executive Committee have increased his claims to our confidence and regard.

*Resolved*, That to dispose of the Fund for the foundation of a Free City Hospital might be interpreted into an expression of an opinion that the City authorities should establish the Hospital, in regard to the policy of which there is known to be a diversity of opinion, therefore,

*Resolved*, That we accede to his request, and that the Fund subscribed, after deducting a sum for the plate, to be presented to him as originally intended, be placed at the disposal of his Honor, the Mayor, for the purpose of aiding in the establishment of a Free Public Library to bear his name, which shall contain a tablet on which shall be inscribed that it is so designated, in grateful acknowledgement of his services during the prevalence of the cholera.

The resolutions were discussed and unanimously adopted.

*Voted*, That the whole matter of carrying out the Resolutions be left entirely to the Executive Committee."

This was the meeting at which we were told, a month since, that a quiet suggestion was made by Major Poore to our informant, whereupon he, hurriedly, wrote a resolution. That resolve must be multiplied by three; at the same time it is to be remarked that, in the last Resolution, it is stated that the subscribers "accede to Mr. Bigelow's request," in appropriating the Vase-fund "for the purpose of aiding in the establishment of a Free Public Library to bear his name," and wherein a special tablet in his honor shall be placed. The statement that the subscribers "accede to the Mayor's request," differs, *in toto*, from the Brinley allegation that "he yielded to the suggestion of others." And as Francis Brinley claims to have written the resolve which donated the Vase-fund for a Library, he must abide by his own words, as recorded by an accurate Secretary, instead of what he now *thinks* he wrote, thirty years later.

Two important facts, in the record of the meetings just recited, must be remembered and emphasized:—

(1) As in all assemblages where a record is kept, so it was here that, at the opening, the proceedings of the former meeting were read, to be approved, or altered if errors should exist. Very well! Then, on February 2, the records of January 16 were read, and no

correction having been made therein, were approved. By this, it appeared from the registered words of two members of the Executive Committee, that Mr. Bigelow wished either a Hospital or Public Library, — being “*particularly emphatic in speaking of the Library.*” Wherein, then, was there any novelty in Mr. Brinley proposing, as late as February 2, that the Vase-fund be appropriated towards a Library, when Mr. Bigelow had distinctly stated weeks, previously, that such was his desire, as is proved by the records?

(2) The second noteworthy fact is, that Mr. Bigelow told the committee, through Dr. Hitchcock, that Abbott Lawrence would give ten thousand dollars to the object. Because, on September 26, 1849, Mr. Lawrence embarked for England, to enter upon his distinguished career as American Ambassador, in which service he resided in London more than three years. Therefore, when Mr. Bigelow informed Dr. Hitchcock what Boston’s foremost merchant proposed doing, he had been absent from the City nearly four months. How, then, did Mr. Bigelow know that his generous kinsman would give the sum named, long before it was breathed aloud, unless a special promise had been obtained before leaving? Such promise had been made, in response to the solicitations of the Mayor: and this view, which I know to be correct, is confirmed by Hon. Samuel D. Crane, who tells me that he heard from Mr. Bigelow, at the time, “*that he had induced his brother-in-law to give ten thousand dollars for a Library.*”

These facts make it obvious, that John P. Bigelow required no *mentor* like Francis Brinley to remind him that a Free Public Library was needed, and deserved generous support; and while, in Mr. Sharp’s record of the February 2 meeting, nothing is said of the “awkward silence” which Mr. Brinley mentions, Col. Henry C. Brooks informs me, on the contrary, that a “feeling of surprise and delight filled the meeting to a man, at Mr. Bigelow’s noble conduct.” Every one said, “what a noble thing he has done.” So strong and general was this sentiment, that Col. Brooks, and many others, personally called on Mr. Bigelow, on the following Monday, to express their great admiration. What nonsense, then, to speak of an “awkward silence”!

It is due to Major Ben. Perley Poore to explain the part which he took at the February 2d meeting, since it was stated in the Evening Gazette of March 25, 1854, “that the Major suggested

the idea of a Library, and advocated it in a speech, for which he was entitled to one or two leaves in the laurel wreath now in dispute."

With a view to ascertain all facts which could throw light on the communication from Newport, I wrote to Major Poore, at Washington, and received from him a manly, clear, and very satisfactory reply; which shows how he naturally would have imagined,—and does now,—that the idea of donating the Vase-fund towards a Public Library was original with himself:

"One Saturday evening," he writes, "I was in search of items for the American Sentinel, a Sunday paper which I then owned and edited, and went to a meeting of the subscribers to the Bigelow testimonial, of which I was one. The meeting was in the front parlor of the Albion Hotel, up-stairs. When I entered the room, my friend, Capt. Put. Bradlee, was opposing the project of a Hospital for the respectable poor. While listening, it occurred to me that this would be the time to start a Public Library, about which I had had many talks with my friend Alexander Vattermare, who had established the nucleus of one at the City Hall. When Capt. Bradlee had concluded his remarks, I spoke briefly on the Public Libraries I had seen in Europe, and suggested that application of the fund." \* \* \* \* "I have not much to be proud of, but I do claim, positively, to have originally suggested that the Bigelow subscription be made the nucleus of a fund for the Public Library."

It thus appears that the Major entered the Albion parlor after the records of the previous meeting had been read, and, presumably, after others than Capt. Bradlee had spoken. He only heard the Captain oppose a Hospital, and then, from his European experience, and with that cleverness and penetration which always distinguish him, suggested and advocated donating the Vase-fund towards a Public Library; and the idea was, to this extent, original with him, and for it he is worthy of praise. At the same time, since Mr. Bigelow had stated to the Executive Committee, prior to January 16, that he wished the money given to a Hospital or Library and, moreover, *was particularly emphatic in speaking of the Library*,—it is plain that, at this adjourned meeting from the one at which such report had been made, both propositions were under discussion, each being original with Mr. Bigelow. In any event, Major Poore's letter strips from Mr. Brinley all claims which he

could, or can, set up, of being an originator of the Library ; while, the fact that the Major spoke aloud to all, instead of whispering aside to one, is another indication of what a vast amount of fable and fustian was sent us from Newport, for "simple facts."

Mr. Sharp's record of a meeting of the Executive Committee, held March 27, 1850, demonstrates who, in their judgment, was the Founder of our Library. For it was then "unanimously voted, that the Treasurer deposit to the credit of J. P. Bigelow, in one of the City banks, the sum of one thousand dollars, said amount to be drawn therefrom when required, *for the foundation of the establishment of a Free City Library.*"

Later, on April 9, 1850, the Secretary, who was also the Treasurer, makes this certificate: "I have this day deposited in the Granite Bank, Boston, in the presence of J. P. Robinson, the sum of one thousand dollars, and received therefor a certificate of deposit, payable on presentation at said bank, endorsed by John P. Bigelow. This certificate was by J. P. Robinson and myself presented to Hon. J. P. Bigelow, *for the foundation of the establishment of a Free Public Library in the City of Boston.*"

Before dismissing these records, it is important to consider Mr. Brinley's startling accusation that the inscription, engraved on the salver presented to Mr. Bigelow, had been materially changed after signing. What the alteration consisted in, we are not left in doubt, for our Newport informant tells us precisely what it was. The words on the salver, which he states were interpolated, are, "*that he suggested,*" whereas, as written, it should have been, "*he yielded to the suggestions of others.*" The expression "*that he suggested,*" does not occur at all, — but the participle, "*suggesting,*" was used. But, passing this, it is well to understand exactly how the inscription, which required one-third of a year to compose, would read with Mr. Brinley's alteration or restoration :

"The Honorable John Prescott Bigelow, declining to receive a costly Vase as a tribute to the faithful discharge of official duty, and, '*yielding to the suggestion of others,*' that the fund obtained for that purpose, be devoted to the founding of a Free City Library, the subscribers to that fund, *having acceded to that suggestion,* do now present this salver to the Hon. Mr. Bigelow, in token of *their high appreciation of that act of enlightened regard for popular learning, and of their respect for him as a man and magistrate.*"

Such absurdity is its own refutation. Because, if Mr. Bigelow had "yielded to the suggestion of others," those "others" were the Executive Committee themselves, and there was no cause, or call, for them, or the subscribers generally, to "accede to a suggestion" of their own making; while assuredly "yielding to the suggestion of others," could hardly be construed as an "act of enlightened regard," worthy of much appreciation or applause!

Let us see how clearly the inscription reads, as engraved on the salver: —

"The Honorable John Prescott Bigelow, Mayor of Boston, declining to receive a costly Vase as a tribute to the faithful discharge of official duty, and suggesting that the fund obtained for that purpose be devoted to the founding of a Free City Library, the subscribers to that fund, having acceded to that suggestion, do now present this salver to the Hon. Mr. Bigelow, in token of their high appreciation of that act of enlightened regard for popular learning, and of their respect for him as a man and magistrate.

ROBT. G. SHAW,  
J. P. ROBINSON,  
DAVID K. HITCHCOCK,  
D. E. JEWETT,  
FRANCIS BRINLEY,  
DANIEL SHARP, JR.,  
JAMES WHITING,  
WILLARD A. HARRINGTON,  
*Committee.*"

Boston, May 20, 1850.

Now to allege that the above inscription was altered after it had been signed in autograph,—as it was,—by each member of the Committee, including Robert G. Shaw, long years President of the Old Boston Bank, is an accusation somewhat in the nature of forgery, and one not to be made without abounding proof. Of this Mr. Brinley has none. For his wild, wicked charge is disproved by Mr. Sharp's record of the inscription, made at the time, which agrees, *verbatim*, with the one engraved on the salver, and is precisely as penned by the Newport gentleman,—provided he wrote it.

Having thus given, as fully as possible, what the Brinley-endorsed-Advertiser editorial calls "the history of this precious thousand dollars," up to the day when it was deposited in the Granite Bank, —prior to its transfer by Mr. Bigelow to the City Treasury, —it is right to consider the real *status* of the Library at or before the reception of the Bigelow Donation. For a hasty perusal of the



Chronology of the Library in its own Handbook for Readers, from which our Secretary read to us in April, might lead to the belief that the institution was already well established. Let us see!

A collection of books, numbering "about fifty volumes," had been given to the City, by Alexander Vattemare, from the Municipal Council of the City of Paris, in November, 1843, which were deposited in the Major's office, in the City Hall. Another like donation, from the same source, reached Boston September 2, 1847, making ninety-six volumes in all, for which our grateful and generous City, through the voluntary offerings of its citizens, sent one thousand books in return! Thereupon, it was ordered: "That the room in the third story and south-east corner of the City Hall be appropriated as a place of deposit, for the donations of the City of Paris and any other books, of a similar nature, that may belong to the City."

Next followed your Father's generous, and, at the time, anonymous offer of \$5,000, for the purpose of making a commencement of a Library, on condition that \$10,000 be raised for the same purpose at large. Had that offer been met, either by the City itself or private individuals, in the spirit in which it was made, Josiah Quincy, Jr., would this day stand recorded, by a right indisputable, as the founder of the Public Library; and, thus, the name of Quincy,—which is almost synonymous with that of Boston itself, because of the great and enlightened works, for its prosperity, rendered by members of your family,—would present another reason for planting their statues where they can be seen and known by all.

But was the offer of Josiah Quincy, Jr., of the Commonwealth,—as distinguished from Josiah Quincy, Jr., of Colonial times,—accepted? We well know it was not: but a Committee was appointed "to consider the expediency of *commencing the formation* of a Public Library, under the control and auspices of the City, with authority to receive donations for the same, either in books or money." Whereupon, two orders were passed by the City Council, the first of which reads thus:—

"ORDERED: That the City of Boston *will accept any donations* from citizens and others, for the purpose of commencing a Public City Library."

Behold, then, the City of Boston, in its corporate capacity, the

identical concentrated "public," which, in the opinion of Francis Brinley and the Advertiser, "is the true founder of the Library," standing, a huge civic alms-seeker,—a veritable Gog and Magog expanded into a more gigantic Frankenstein,—with figurative hat in hand, willing to "accept any donations, from citizens, and others, *for the purpose of commencing a Public City Library!*" Really, Barkis himself, on "willingness," was nowhere in comparison with the City of Boston, on the book question in 1847!

Some short time prior to October 31, 1849, the mysterious literary crypt in the "third story and southeast corner of City Hall," was opened to receive 187 volumes of Congressional Documents, sent by Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, by no means entertaining or *light* literature, being what Dickens calls "goodly octavos, with a red label behind, and that under-done-pie-crust-colored cover, which is technically known as law calf." Next followed a contribution of 219 volumes from John D. W. Williams, of Roxbury, which, presumably, were the first books such as would be sought for and read in a library that had, thus far, been presented. This gift was made in consequence of the direct solicitation of Mayor Bigelow, as I have been assured by Mr. Williams.

I will follow the names of the book donors, as printed in the Chronology of the Library, which precede Mr. Bigelow's donation, together with the official list of volumes presented by each one, prior to 1855: Samuel A. Eliot, 85 volumes, 2 pamphlets; Dr. J. Mason Warren, 30 vols.; Rev. J. B. McMahan, M. D., 19 vols.; Ezra Weston,—none at all!

I am aware that Mr. Weston's name appears as one who had given valuable works, in a letter from Mayor Bigelow, dated June 9, 1851; also in the report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Public Library, made at the close of the same year. While, conversely, I am equally certain that, in the two official lists of book donors, published by the City in 1855 and 1858, his name is wanting. What became of Mr. Weston's contributions? Did some intensely greedy bookworm fairly *devour* them?

But after this conglomerate collection—constituting, from all the *data* at command, a total of 636 volumes and 2 pamphlets, contributed all the way from A. Vattermare to Ezra Weston,—was there, in any healthy, honest sense, a City Library? Was there a place where the renowned "public," which had "founded" this literary congress of odds-and-ends, could repair for recreation and instruc-

tion, or to borrow books? Were these few volumes—not two-thirds of what our pious, Puritan City had given to the gay, wealthy Metropolis by the Seine,—a free Public Library? Hear this, ye thousands! who throng the already insufficient building on Boylston street,—and marvel at the short-sighted policy which did not locate the structure elsewhere, when acres of land could be had almost “by the asking,”—hear what kind of a *free* Library the City of Boston possessed at the time it was the recipient of Mr. Bigelow’s donation! “No persons were allowed to borrow the books excepting those officially engaged at the City Hall.”

Imagine the rapture of a clerk in the Water Register’s Office, about the first day of March,—as the sixty days’ grace for paying water rates are expiring,—while reflecting, during his hours of overwork, that he enjoys the privilege of repairing to a certain third-story apartment in the building wherein he toils, and reading a treatise on the Internal Police of France! Or an employé in the City Treasurer’s Department, on the last day of October, finding consolation and cheer in the thought that, after the tax-paying throngs have departed, he can enter that same *mare clausum*, and bear to his home a book of Statistics of general and local interest—in French—or a Congressional Public Document, of uncertain age and value! But the multitude of book-borrowers and book and magazine readers, who now crowd the Library, could then only aimlessly pass up and down School street, and, gazing at the windows of the mysterious third-story-south-east apartment, try to solve this riddle: What *can* be the topics discussed in those two pamphlets?

We arrive now at the time when John P. Bigelow gave his *very* precious one thousand dollars to the city, accompanying the donation with a letter from which Mr. Brinley quotes in a mutilated form. That letter, which was the real corner-stone of the institution, deserves to be recited in full:

TO HENRY B. ROGERS, Esq.,

*Chairman pro tem. of the Board of Aldermen:*

BOSTON, August 5, 1850.

Sir: An amount of money having been contributed by some of my fellow-citizens for the purpose of personal kindness towards myself, I have obtained their permission to present a large portion

thereof to the City, *in aid of the establishment of a Free Public Library.*

I accordingly now enclose the sum of one thousand dollars, in the hope that it may be appropriated for the furtherance of the object proposed.

The want of such an institution in our midst, is generally acknowledged. It has an important prospective bearing upon the moral and intellectual character of the people of Boston ; and I have reason to know that there are many persons in this community, who are ready to tender valuable offerings for the purpose in view, as soon as it shall be known that the City Government is willing to receive such donations.

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN P. BIGELOW.

“Whereupon, that good old man Alderman Moses Grant,” — which is one simple fact stated by Mr. Brinley,—as of right he should have done, by being on the Library Committee,—offered a Preamble and Resolution in this wise :

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN,

AUGUST 5, 1850.

*Whereas*, His Honor the Mayor has communicated to this Board, that he has received a sum of money, which was subscribed by his fellow-citizens (to be appropriated for his personal benefit) as a tribute of their respect ; and, whereas, consent has been obtained from the liberal donors of the money (at the kind suggestion of the Mayor) that the amount be appropriated *to the establishment of a Free Public Library* ; one of the most desirable and useful objects to which it could be given ; and in which all classes of this community will be benefited :—therefore,

*Resolved*, That we gratefully accept the offered sum by the Mayor, of one thousand dollars, referred to above, and hereby request the Committee of the City Government on the Library *to proceed with as little delay as possible*, and as far as the means in their hands will justify, *to carry into effect the establishment of a ‘Free Public Library,’*—assurance having been given from several influential and wealthy persons of their readiness to coöperate in the measure, as soon as the same is commenced.”

Mark the expression! "Request the Committee of the City Government on the Library to proceed with as little delay as possible to carry into effect the establishment of a Free Public Library!" Words cannot be more explicit, nor the law of cause and effect receive better or plainer exemplification. The Library *was* established at this time, and as a result of the Bigelow Donation; and it is a marked fact,—considering from whose pockets, according to the Advertiser, the money issued,—that the leading Temperance man in Boston, and Massachusetts, should have offered the City's Resolution of Thanks for a fund which had been bestowed by liquor sellers! It was not so given, as has already been explained. The character and good name of the Alderman who offered the Resolution, alone brand the assertion as false; for, had the money been contributed from such sources, Moses Grant would have been the last man living to return thanks for such tainted gift,—as he would have regarded it,—had he been, not only an Alderman, but a sort of perpetual Mayor of Boston, as Mayor Doyle appears to be of Providence.

But Francis Brinley asks,—with a sneer worthy of Talleyrand,—“Who was at the bottom of all this attempt to strengthen the decrepit claim of Mr. Bigelow?” There had been no claim made in Mayor Bigelow's behalf,—prior to the passage of Deacon Grant's Resolution,—either “decrepit” or vigorous, and that Resolution, alone, announced the establishment of a Free Public Library. But I will tell you, Sir, who was at the top and bottom—who was inside and outside—of all wrong doing in claiming for Mr. Bigelow credit not his due,—were any such claim instituted at that time,—and it was Francis Brinley, then (whether he knows it or not) President of the Common Council. For, in that capacity, it was his official duty, and he was bound by his oath of office to expose or prevent any injustice being done—of which he had knowledge—in connection with a public institution. And if his words are of any value, the long-continued friendship between Mr. Bigelow and himself had now come to an end; so that rancor, alone, would make him more zealous in exposing any “decrepit claim” made in Mr. Bigelow's behalf.

Now, the Mayor's letter of August 5, 1850, and the Preamble and Resolution of the Board of Aldermen in reply, (the Common Council were then enjoying a hard earned Summer vacation!) were printed the following day in the newspapers. Therefore, Francis

Brinley knew at that time, at least, what the Board of Aldermen had placed on record, better than he does now ; and then was his golden hour to make public and energetic protest. Did he do so? No! But I am reminded, by what has just been said, that it was the Council's Summer vacation, and, of course, he was out of the City. But he was in Boston six days later, in any event ; for, on August 12th, he was sent by Mayor Bigelow a special messenger, to his own Newport, to invite Henry Clay to visit this City, as before recited, — returning, on the 14th instant, with Mr. Clay's written declination. And, assuredly, if ever there was an occasion where such an amazing secret as Mr. Brinley cherished would — and must — have burst from the bosom of its possessor, — and he a prominent city official, — it was on Thursday, August 15th, 1850, when, in the same room where the "decrepit claim" Resolution had been enacted, all the City dignitaries, with many invited guests, were assembled, to march in procession to Faneuil Hall, there to listen to your Father's Eulogy on Zachary Taylor. Then, — when minute guns were booming both on land and water ; when all places of business were closed ; when dwellings and public buildings were draped, and sad faces were seen at windows and on the street, — "the entire population," as was said at the time, "seeming to participate in the demonstration" ; when the day itself, cloudy and gloomy, appeared to take part in solemnities which had never been equalled in Boston, — was the time for a loyal citizen's heart to unveil itself, and make known that a false claim had been made in favor of a justly popular Mayor, because something was whispered mildly into Francis Brinley's ear, who thereupon wrote a Library founding resolution ! But Mr. Brinley held his peace on this conscience searching occasion ; and having held it then, it behoved him to hold it forever.

But the President of the Common Council had other opportunities to make known his "simple facts," and vindicate and rectify history. Mention has previously been made of the Faneuil Hall meeting at which he presided and spoke, commending the nomination of Mr. Bigelow for Governor. What an occasion was this to point out the recent wrong done by the Board of Aldermen ! But, no. Instead of that, Mr. Brinley made remarks favoring the nomination of John P. Bigelow for the highest office in the Commonwealth ! Still other openings were afforded the friend of historians to disclose his latent secret during the time we are considering, but

he allowed them to pass unimproved. For, on August 20, 1850, a special meeting was convened of such members of the Council as City Messenger Spurr could summon, in order to thank your Father for his Taylor Eulogy, and also to officially acknowledge Edward Everett's donation of a large collection of State Papers and Public Documents, made by letter, dated two days after the receipt of Mr. Bigelow's donation. At this time the tongue of Francis Brinley wagged not. While another and grander opportunity was afforded on September 5th, at the first regular meeting of the Common Council following the vacation, the members assembling in the identical Board of Aldermen's room where the Grant Resolution was passed,—as their own Council Chamber was undergoing repairs. It seems to me that the very chair, or dais, from which one month previous the Resolution of Alderman Grant had been put and carried, and from which John P. Bigelow's letter had been read, would have thundered for justice,—all the while Mr. Brinley sat, mused, and was dumb! That silence is far more valuable than cyclopædias of communications such as he troubled us with; and from Francis Brinley, a twenty years' exile from his native City, and an octogenarian ripening for the grave, I appeal to Francis Brinley, President of the Common Council in 1850 and 1851, to give a final and decisive denial of all his present cries and charges respecting altered inscriptions, hastily penned resolutions, and decrepit claims.

We have now reached the initial stage in the real and continuous life of the Library. It had, for years, been a species of *ignis fatuis*, floating in, or before, the minds of public spirited citizens, from that evening of May 5, 1841, when a meeting convened in Masonic Temple, to consider the expediency of establishing a literary and scientific institution, as recommended by A. Vattemare. Even then, an excellent committee on the subject was appointed,—Hon. Charles F. Adams being a member,—which reported in favor of the undertaking. But, the only result was the passage of certain brave and baseless resolves, leading to as little practical result as the fabled conference on the expediency of “belling the cat.” It has been well said of this attempt to inaugurate a Public Library, “that the idea, if it ever existed in more than twenty heads, was guarded as one of too much importance to be publicly aired.” Then followed, in due course, your Father's noble offer of \$5,000, which was answered by an ignoble

silence. Then we find the Barkis-willing city anxious to receive any donations for the purpose of commencing a Public City Library: while a scheme for uniting the Boston Athenæum with a City Library, where your Father's name appears as Chairman of the Joint Special Committee that proposed it, when it rose to sight five years later, and was seemingly on the eve of accomplishment, was rendered impossible by the energy and eloquence of that Nestor of citizens, your own Grandfather. And now we reach August 5th, 1850, when, because of Mayor Bigelow's donation, the Library Committee were "directed with as little delay as possible, to carry into effect the establishment of a Free City Library." Col. William W. Clapp, has aptly denominated this gift as "the nest-egg of the enterprise."

But Mr. Bigelow's interest in the nascent institution did not rest with simply giving the thousand-dollar Fund, which sum, when he determined thus to dispose of it, he presumed would amount to two thousand dollars or more. For it has already been said that \$2,400 had been subscribed. It is true; but, when it was ascertained that Mr. Bigelow would receive no personal testimonial, nearly one-half of the subscribers refused to pay, and thus a much smaller amount was realized for a Library than was presumed when he concluded thus to appropriate the Fund. But, at the time of declining the silver Vase, the Mayor believed, in good faith, that, by the act, the Library would be richer by, at least, two thousand dollars.

The time when Mr. Bigelow made known the fact that Abbott Lawrence would give ten thousand dollars to a Library, has been pointed out, and the promise—as need not be said—was, in due time, fulfilled. But the act of enlisting Abbott Lawrence's bounty in behalf of the enterprise, did not limit Mr. Bigelow's exertions. He was aware of Joshua Bates' great love for books, and also Mr. Bates' gratitude,—as afterwards expressed,—for the many acts of confidence and kindness he had received from his many friends in this City, as well as his attachment to Boston, where his notable mercantile career commenced. Mr. Bigelow made special interest with Mr. Lawrence, before leaving home, to have Mr. Bates' attention called to a Library for Boston. This was followed by letters on the subject, both to Abbott Lawrence and Col. T. Bigelow Lawrence, asking Father and Son, alike, to interest Mr. Bates in behalf of the institution which the Mayor had so fondly at heart.



Rev. Dr. Andrew Bigelow was abroad from June 22 to September 17, 1852, passing a large part of the time at Mr. Lawrence's residence, 138 Picadilly; and he not only had special charge from his brother to have "Abbott talk with Mr. Bates about the Library," but he knew, personally, of many such conversations,—even speaking with Mr. Bates, himself, on the subject. Mr. Lawrence said, at the time, that he had told Mr. Bates what he proposed giving to the Library himself. Dr. Bigelow knew that the Bates bounty was due largely to Abbott Lawrence, who was but seconding and carrying forward the wishes and suggestions of John P. Bigelow. He also wrote from London that Mr. Bates was going to give fifty thousand dollars to the Library, which was sometime prior to the fact being made public in Boston: and Hon. Nat. Seaver was told the same by John P. Bigelow, long before the receipt of the first Bates letter of October 1, 1852. This date was sixteen days before Abbott Lawrence left London to return to America.

I am not unaware that the Chronology of the Library prints this: "Joshua Bates, Esq., of London, prompted by the perusal of the report of July 6th, gave \$5,000, [a blundering misprint, worthy of Mrs. Malaprop, for \$50,000], which was subsequently funded." What Mr. Bates says, himself, on the subject, from all that I can gather, is this: "I am indebted to you for a copy of the Report of the Trustees of the Public Library for the City of Boston, which I have perused with great interest, being impressed with the importance, to the rising and future generations, of such a Library as is recommended." Now this, in no sense, militates with what has been said about Abbott Lawrence's agency, both by precept and practice, in the matter; and I say, unhesitatingly, that the influence of Abbott Lawrence, seconded by his wondrous personal magnetism, which carried success into all his life-enterprises, whether it was founding a City, endowing a Scientific School, bringing Agassiz to America, or initiating means to feed the famishing in Ireland, had far more effect in bringing to pass Mr. Bates' Donation, than twenty Reports such as the one referred to,—notwithstanding its admitted ability and scholarship.

But, aside from the general facts named, which as clearly show the hand of Mr. Bigelow in the Bates Donation as in the books which he gave personally to the Library himself, I am told by gentlemen, who know whereof they affirm, that they have read a

letter, or letters, from Mr. Bates, in which he stated that he never would have given his donation to Boston Library had it not been for Mr. Bigelow's gift. This I assert on the testimony of others, who are worthy of all credit. But what I know directly and personally is this: my honored and beloved kinsman, COL. T. BIGELOW LAWRENCE, was connected with the American Embassy, at London, more than five years, — remaining there under James Buchanan, after his Father's return to America. He was thus in London, not only on October 1, 1852, but, also, on March 10, 1853, and September 8, 1855, when the second and third Bates letters were written. Moreover, he was very intimate with Mr. Bates, seeing him, familiarly and frequently, not only at Mr. Bates' own residence, at East Sheen, but, also, at his Father's and his own. More than this, Col. Lawrence had been heartily enlisted in behalf of the Library, before embarking from the United States, on July 2d, 1850; and in requital for special and signal personal favors and kindness, shown him by his Uncle, at an important and painful crisis of his life, he was particularly alive to aught which would redound to the credit of his loyal kinsman. It is, then, from Col. Lawrence, himself, that I have the assurance of what Mr. Bates told him several times, in these words: "I never would have given what I did to the Boston Public Library had it not been for your Uncle's donation."

This, with Col. Lawrence's knowledge of his Father's conferences on the Library topic with Mr. Bates (for the great banker would repeatedly pass fifteen or twenty minutes at the Office of the Embassy, on his way to the City, even before 9 o'clock, though, to do so, he had breakfasted at 7, and driven seven miles), as well as his own interviews, on the subject, which he has informed me of, give full warrant for the clause in the City's Resolutions in praise of Mr. Bigelow, where honor is ascribed to him for "securing the generous aid of two of the Library's earliest and most munificent patrons," — the two being Abbott Lawrence and Joshua Bates.

And here I am naturally reminded of the Advertiser's editorial, that Mr. Brinley favored us with, and which meets with his severe approval. The article was printed on January 30, 1864, and was a criticism on a Public Dinner tendered to Mr. Bigelow, by certain friends and citizens, at the Tremont House, which occurred on January 28. "This thing was not done in a corner," nor were any "cunningly devised fables" there indulged in. The presence of

Gov. John A. Andrew, Alexander H. Bullock, Samuel D. Crane, Thomas Russell, N. B. Shurtleff, and J. E. Field, President of the Senate, make this evident, together with earnest letters from Charles Sumner and Alexander H. Rice. Gov. Andrew bore public and appreciative testimony to John P. Bigelow's kindness to himself "many years ago, a stranger, from another State, in the City of Boston, a student-at-law, scarcely knowing a person in all the broad domain of the Tri-Mountain City: and he did not hesitate to say that among the pleasant facts, among the pleasant memories, among the agreeable and affectionate reminiscences of that earlier period of my history, I associate always the kindly, genial, cordial, friendly, jocund and yet affectionate treatment of the gentleman who was then my senior, but always my friend."

The banquet was given "in view of the great success which attended the donation of one thousand dollars, made to the City of Boston in the year 1850, for the formation of a Free Public Library, — being the first money contribution for the purpose."

But the Advertiser's *dictum* that "a party of gentlemen, assembled over their wine, cannot make the facts of history different from what they really are," coupled with the assertion that the "precious thousand dollars" was a virtual contribution of liquor sellers "to whom Mayor Bigelow gave great satisfaction," would naturally convey the idea that the gentleman, to whom the banquet was proffered, was thus "hob-a-nobbing, glass-to-glass," with friends and familiars, wholly regardless of the worse than Egyptian skeleton which was to emerge from the Advertiser's *sanctum* two mornings after.

But this was far from being the case. For, about three months previously, Mr. Bigelow had been called upon to endure the last great heart-shock of his life, — a shock from which his overworked frame never rallied. Death had indeed entered the "house of his gods," and in the sudden removal of his only child, Prescott Bigelow, on October 14, 1863, his last and solitary earthly hope was shattered. I am sure if any gentlemen present were acquainted with MR. PRESCOTT BIGELOW, they will bear me out in the statement that he was a Son of whom any Father might well have been proud, and whose death, in what seemed the meridian of life, was sad, startling and solemn. For he was admitted to be a perfect type of the Christian gentleman: and his manly beauty was but an external mirror, reflecting the moral loveliness which distinguished his life and character.

It was, consequently, from the virtual grave of this worthy son of a worthy sire, that John P. Bigelow was invited to the Tremont House banquet; and while, because of grief and feeble health, he did not attend, personally, except to shake hands with the friends who were present, yet he did leave with them a letter, which was read and printed,—a letter which, from the time and circumstances under which it was written, should be received and trusted, with as much confidence in its statements, as if it had been sworn to before a convocation of priests and prelates.

The letter in full is as follows, with the omission of a paragraph giving to Edward Everett, George Ticknor, N. B. Shurtleff and William W. Greenough, the respective praise, in connection with the early history of the Library, to which they were entitled:

LETTER OF HON. JOHN P. BIGELOW.

Boston, January 28, 1864.

SAMUEL D. CRANE, Esq., Chairman, &c., &c., &c.

SIR: I have received, with mingled feelings of surprise and regret, an invitation to a public dinner, on the part of those who appreciate my services in founding the Public Library—*surprise* that I should have lived to witness such estimate of my doings (though I had no doubt that something commemorative thereof would take place subsequently to my death),—*regret* that you should have to seek in the house of mourning for the favored guest of your festive board. The reasons why I cannot accept your proffered hospitality must be known to some, if not all, of you, and I presume need not be specified. But I am asked by some of those associated with you in your generous tribute to give an account of circumstances preceding and following the founding of the Library, and with this request I now readily comply:

For some years previous to 1850 there had been much talk in the City Government and among the people about the expediency or necessity of a *Public Library*, as a consequence, or completion of our system of popular education. Gov. Everett, while President of the University, was a frequent and earnest advocate for such an institution, and of course his advice and suggestions were listened to with attention and respect. But the City Government, doubtless actuated by proper motives, procrastinated action. In the meantime, books came in from various sources—from Mons. Vattemare, the Hon. Messrs. Winthrop, Quincy and others,—(I, myself, while Secretary of the Commonwealth, from 1836 to 1843, had contributed a considerable number),—but no response, favoring the founding of a Library, was elicited from the Government.

In January, 1850, Mr. Everett wrote to me, from Cambridge, an earnest appeal on this subject, saying to me: "I hope you will be able to do something this year toward the establishment of a City Library," and intimating his inten-

tion to offer for the acceptance of the City his collection of public documents, "containing near a thousand volumes, when some chasms are filled." I then determined that the year should *not* pass away without a strenuous effort on my part to accomplish the desired object, even if expense were necessary from my own slender resources. Soon afterwards, the contribution of my fellow-citizens, for what was called the *Bigelow Vase*, gave me an opportunity, by their permission, to make a donation to the City for the object in view, without entrenching upon my own means. This was done, and the response of the City Government was prompt and decisive. The Public Library was voted a favorite object of municipal care and attention. My brother-in-law, then Minister at London, on hearing of the transaction, wrote to me of his warm approval thereof, and his intention to do something considerable towards the same object. He also informed me that his friend Joshua Bates was likewise pleased with the idea, and intended to contribute from his funds in the same direction. How nobly Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Bates fulfilled their intentions, is well known to all! Other contributions of books and money rapidly flowed in, and our Free Public Library soon became a proud monument of civic and individual munificence.

\* \* \* \* \*

I beg to offer to those whom you represent my grateful thanks for your kindness. The one, the thought of whom would be quite foreign to the pleasures of your banquet, would have appreciated, even more highly than I can do, your generous consideration for his parent.

With great respect, your obedient servant,

JOHN P. BIGELOW.

I am here brought face to face with the Advertiser's *dictum*, heartily approved by Francis Brinley, that "the Public Library of Boston is the creature of the public," and that "the true founder of the Library is the public." The public founded the Public Library! As correct as to say that the public founded Harvard College, and not John Harvard, with his endowment of seven hundred pounds!

Let me ask, was there no "public" in Boston prior to 1850, when the first appropriation was made for a Library, from the City Treasury? Sir Edmund Andros must have thought that Boston had a very energetic "public" when, on the morning of April 18, 1689, he heard that the North End and South End of the town had risen simultaneously to arms, that drums were beating, fierce men were gathering, and the ensign had been set on the beacon; and when, at a later hour of the same day, 'mid an armed multitude of old men and young, with windows and balconies alive with dames and damsels looking vengeance and heaping imprecations, through the town's narrow streets, with the air thick with stones, clubs, guns,

shrieks and curses, he—pale, trembling and bound with cords—was led, or rather dragged by the coat collar, from Mr. Usher's house to Fort Hill.

Peter Faneuil must have imagined there was assuredly a very ungracious and ungrateful "public" in Boston, when, upon proposing "on his own proper cost, to build a noble and complete structure to be improved for a market, for the sole use and benefit of the town, provided the town would accept the same," his generous offer was accepted by the meagre and disgraceful majority of seven, out of seven hundred and twenty-seven votes.

Thomas Hutchinson must have entertained the idea that Boston had a very demonstrative "public," when, on the night of August 26, 1765, he heard them thundering with broad-axes, at the entrance of his mansion on Garden Court street; and when, through shattered doorways and windows, a frantic multitude swayed, swept and thronged, filling the house from cellar to garret; unroofing the cupola; demolishing every part of the mansion; shattering as much of the staunch brick-work itself as would yield to their strength and frenzy; laying violent and thieving hands on wearing apparel, wines and jewels; wrecking everything which wealth and taste had accumulated; leaving only shattered doors, windows and furniture; and throwing to the winds, or flames, valuable papers and books, in print and manuscript, relating to the early history of Boston and Massachusetts, — collected, like Mr. Brinley's "simple facts," for purposes of history, — together with family memorials, thus entailing a loss that never could be made good, and one which we, as members of this Boston Antiquarian Club, can well deplore.

Indeed, there has been a "public" in Boston, more or less peculiar and potential, from the time that John Winthrop first settled on the Tri-Mountain peninsula, or from the day when he quarrelled with Gov. Dudley, to this, its two hundred and fiftieth year of settlement, — an astute, active, contemplative, conscientious, generous, money-making, liberty-loving public; and it has been alive with as wise and liberal a class of citizens as ever thronged the bourse, guilds or exchange of any metropolis on the globe. For a City which can enumerate such illustrious sons belonging to her, as Phillips, Pemberton and Perkins, Lawrence, Lowell and Lyman, Shaw, Grey, Quincy and Appleton; not to speak of NATHANIEL THAYER, among the living, of whom it has lately been

written that his gifts and endowments to Harvard College, alone, exceed a quarter of a million of dollars, and who, with the generosity and spirit of Prince Henry of Portugal, sent the world's greatest *savant* to explore a Southern continent and Southern seas; nor of DAVID SEARS, among the departed, who, also, donated more than a quarter of a million of dollars, to feed, clothe and shelter the poor, the aged and the feeble, whose prayers and blessings will forever keep his name and memory vernal and alive;—  
 A City, too, where every educational, philanthropic and Christian undertaking finds quick response, from the earliest planted church and school, down to the *in futuro* Home for Invalids now soliciting endowment; needs no unearned praise, for it is a community always to be held in honor. But when the “public” of Boston are assigned the distinction of having *founded* the Public Library, it is a species of commendation wholly undeserved.

Necessarily, of course, after the munificent donation of Joshua Bates, the large gift as well as bequest of Jonathan Phillips, with that of Abbott Lawrence, and valuable presents in money or books from others, which succeeded Mr. Bigelow's first money gift, the public funds have flowed forth liberally to maintain and enlarge a justly popular institution, and, assuredly, one of Boston's chiefest objects of pride. But, not until the Library had become popular, and there were votes to be obtained by favoring what citizens, generally, were thankful to have enriched, did those representatives of Boston's “public,”—the City Council,—grant any marked favors to the Library. Why, more than this: not until Mr. Bates' first letter *compelled* the erection of a building, and the proper endowment of a Library by the City,—when, in fact, by the requirements of his proposed donation, the faith of the City was pledged to its generous benefactor,—did the “public's” representatives do much that was commendable. For, up to that time, the civic Belisarius stood, hat in hand, soliciting, for Library purposes, oboli and octavos, denarii and duodecimos, dimes and dime novels, cents and codices, or, in fact, anything which might be dropped by sympathetic book-hungry passers-by into the outstretched, bibliographic beaver.

There is much abuse, or false use, of this familiar word—“public.” Oftimes, undue praise is given; and, again, less than is merited. Now, it is the “dear public,” of the ambitious, place-seeking demagogue; and, now, the “ungrateful public” of the

same individual, when a defeated candidate, or disgraced official. Why, as a rule, the "public" are not quick to initiate great schemes, which necessitate larger appropriations and increased taxes. The pioneers in progress, — the *avant couriers* in the Grand Army of humanity, plant their banners at some advanced out-post: a generation moves on, and lo! a great victory, for the rights and happiness of mankind. Or, to change the similitude, a little seed-corn is planted by modest, thoughtful, God-loving hands; the result, a golden harvest of ripened grain. The "public," in fact, are, too often, like a sleeping elephant, with colossal dormant powers, capable of vast possibilities of strength and sagacity, and yet, while the slumber-spell remains, as inert, for all practical purposes, as its hairy, fossil-brother the mammoth, or the mastodon of the tertiary epoch. At such time, an active squirrel, or even a mouse, which can gnaw a netted lion into freedom, is of more practical potentiality. But that same elephant aroused, on his feet, and gaily caparisoned, treads grandly to the sound of bells and trumpets, whether swelling the armies of Porus, Pyrrhus, Antiochus and Hannibal, or taking part in the enthroning pageant of India's latest Empress.

But, from the nebulous "public," we turn to one who was the founder of what is now the largest Public Library on the Continent, — a simple, earnest, practical, warm-hearted magistrate, who, while in office, forgot self and remembered the vital interests of the public, themselves, and to whom repeated Municipal Resolutions ascribe the honor which is his due, — JOHN PRESCOTT BIGELOW.

By the enumeration of Boston's most liberal sons, just given, I am reminded of a parting specification or excuse of Francis Brinley, with which, when it is answered, I will gladly dismiss him and his communication. In reply to the natural question: Why did he not make known his startling facts about the Public Library at the time? He says: "I was urged to silence, [as he had "urged Mr. Bigelow to silence," in that unmagisterial Sabbath conference!] for fear that I might irritate some of Mr. Bigelow's family connections; and, to avoid any chance of injury to the cause, I made no public statement of facts."

I must admit having been much puzzled at this sentence of Mr. Brinley. By the word "cause," we are to understand, presumably, the City Library: but how was the presentation of such "simple



facts" as he retails in his communication, to interfere with the freedom of will of Mr. Bigelow's "family connections"? For these were very few. Surely, my own revered Father—REV. DR. ANDREW BIGELOW, who was plodding, with warm heart and all the strength which the God whom he served had given him, among cellars and garrets, wherever he could find want and relieve suffering, — never could have thrown the dimmest shadow over Mr. Brinley's ambitious aspirations or latent thoughts: and yet he was the sole brother of John P. Bigelow, in Boston. The only other possible "family connection" was Abbott Lawrence, — with whose promised gift of \$10,000 for the Library Mr. Brinley had become familiar, at the meetings of the Vase subscribers. What a paltry, pitiable plea! To imagine that ABBOTT LAWRENCE, who, — from the day he entered Boston (October 8, 1808), a poor boy, with his great future before him, till he was borne to Mt. Auburn, August 22, 1855, — its first and most honorable citizen, — with tears and tokens of respect such as seldom accompany a City's richest resident to the tomb, — was, at all times, the living soul of honor, and whose simplest word was not only "as good as a bond," but better than some people's oaths, — to think that such a merchant and man — would have hesitated about fulfilling a sacred promise, and one deliberately given (for John P. Bigelow was too loyal a kinsman to make public declaration as to what Abbott Lawrence would do, or give, without express authority first obtained), because Major Poore had whispered to Francis Brinley, who thereupon "took pen and paper, and hurriedly wrote a resolution"! Did your Father, — General Quincy, — who, for twenty years was almost a next-door neighbor of Mr. Lawrence, — and fellow-soldiers, they were, in the great Whig party, ranking among its Chiefs, — so construe Abbott Lawrence's promises as to fancy they were liable to pass away, like Summer clouds, before a zephyred nothing? No, sir! one thousand noes to such an idle stigma on the memory of Abbott Lawrence, whose plighted gift to the Library was as secure at the moment the promise was made, as it was on the day when the \$10,000 were paid, by his Executors, into the City Treasury.

Moreover, Mr. Brinley's other statements prove that this was not the cause of his silence; because, the "simple facts" recently communicated, *in extenso*, to this Club, were epitomized in "M.'s" article in the Journal, of March 20, 1854, Mr. Brinley, of course,

communicating the *data* to the writer, since there was no one beside him who would or could have done so. Now this publication appeared seventeen months before Mr. Lawrence's death, and long previous to the date of his will, which was January 27, 1855. This, if ever, was a dangerous time for the "cause" Mr. Brinley had so warmly at heart; and had his real motive for keeping silent been the one now alleged, "M." would not have vexed the columns of the Journal while Abbott Lawrence was alive. That fact alone rends this cobweb of sophistry.

But, after the death of Mr. Lawrence, what has kept Francis Brinley dumb, while decades of years have passed? Why did he not send an indignant protest when the Tremont House banquet was held? Why not remonstrate when, in 1869, the City Council's Resolutions were passed? Why not break a silence, that was Sphynx-like, when, at Mr. Bigelow's death, the Resolutions were again ratified? Why not protest to Samuel Foster McCleary, for what he printed in the Municipal Register, in 1864; or to Mayor Prince, directly his Inaugural, for the current year, was published? Well, Sir, it is evident that "Gallio cared for none of these things." But when an important, standard History of Boston is to be given to the world, and "simple facts" are in demand, then the volcano speaks, — and mutterings and smoke are the result!

It is right, before closing, to state, unqualifiedly, that—in certain quarters and among uncertain people—there has been a manifest attempt to deny to Mr. Bigelow the honor in connection with the Library which his modesty, magnanimity and merits have earned. And notably has this been true when his name should have been spoken with eulogy. Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, in his Address at laying the corner-stone of the Library, said: "I need not name a late Mayor of our City [Hon. John P. Bigelow], who so handsomely diverted the amount which had been raised for a well-merited memorial of his own faithful services, to the purpose of conferring a fresh benefit on those who had thus sought to honor him." Yet, among the forty-seven objects placed in the securely-soldered box beneath the corner-stone, — a box fitly "made of a composition resembling *brass*," as we are officially told,—no room was found for Mr. Bigelow's letter of August 5, 1850, nor for the Grant Preamble and Resolution of the same date; while there was space for the letter of a wealthy lady, written five years later than Mr. Bigelow's, and donating precisely the same amount of money as

he did to the Library! At the completion of the building, the name of John P. Bigelow was not breathed aloud, — the omission being a studied and culpable one. And yet, there he sat among the assembled Trustees, wrapped in his cloak, — certainly, on that day, Sparta's worthiest son, — and the real founder of that institution whose prosperity was alike his pleasure and pride. While it is always well to "let the dead bury their dead," I will say, that I care not how eminent or eloquent a man may be, his soul is not white before the angels — who uses a great occasion to do a small thing! While a thousand wrongs will not make a right, neither can prejudice or malice alter an assured historical fact, nor strip one leaf from the brow worthy to wear a vernal chaplet.

How, then, stand the claims of John P. Bigelow, in connection with the origin of the Library?

(1) The resolutions of the subscribers to the "Bigelow Vase" prove that the \$1,000 donation to the Library *was* Mr. Bigelow's original idea, and that the money donated by him "was for the purpose of aiding in the establishment of a Free Public Library," and so emphatically was he regarded as its founder by those gentlemen, that it was to bear his name.

(2) The united testimony of all the living subscribers to the "Bigelow Vase" with whom I have conversed, — showing that their belief has stood the test of thirty years of corroding time, — which is aptly summarized in the words of Hon. Jarvis D. Braman, "Mr. John P. Bigelow is entitled to the credit of having founded the Public Library, by his Donation."

(3) The inscription on the silver salver presented to Mayor Bigelow, with the engraved signatures of Robert G. Shaw and others, — as well as the same recorded in the Subscribers' Book, — states that "the fund, obtained as a personal tribute for the faithful discharge of official duty, was, at Mr. Bigelow's suggestion, devoted to the founding of a Free City Library."

(4) Col. William W. Clapp, on March 25, 1854, wrote editorially: "It cannot be denied that the first pecuniary gift, for the establishment of a City Library, came from Hon. John P. Bigelow, and, that through his agency the project received its *vital spark*." And he further said: "Since Mr. Bigelow gave the Library his support, it has been progressing slowly but surely. There is no break in the work, and to him, therefore, we believe, belongs a very large share of the gratitude which the citizens who frequent this resort will experience for its friends and founders."

(5) In the Boston Municipal Register of 1864, the City Clerk, S. F. McCleary, — who had perfect knowledge of the Library from its initial movement, — bears this testimony: “Although the need of a Public Library had been, for a considerable time, felt and acknowledged, and a small number of volumes of a miscellaneous character had been sent to the City Hall, with a view to the future formation of such an institution, nothing definite, in relation thereto, was done, until the 5th of August, 1850, when Hon. John P. Bigelow, then Mayor of the City, contributed the sum of \$1,000 for the purpose of establishing the Public Library. This donation, being the first money that was given for the object, was received joyfully, and funded by the City Council; and the Committee on the Library were directed to proceed, with as little delay as possible, to carry into effect the establishment of a Free Public Library.”

(6) The Hon. Samuel D. Crane, as Chairman of the Committee on the Tremont House banquet, — which was “a testimonial of respect, and in commemoration of the first gift to the City of Boston towards the endowment of a Free Public Library, which was made by Mr. Bigelow,” — wrote: “To you, my dear Sir, belongs the credit of calling public attention to the subject of a Free Public Library, by the material aid you afforded in the first money contribution; while others have given larger sums, our citizens will ever cherish the patriotism that prompted you to lay this corner-stone, on which they have so successfully built.”

(7) Charles Sumner wrote the following letter:—

SENATE CHAMBER, 20th January, 1864.

MY DEAR SIR:

It is too late for me to send anything for your meeting tomorrow evening; but it is not too late for me to express the gratitude and admiration with which, at the time, I witnessed the appropriation of that first \$1,000 to a Free Public Library in Boston. The money collected as a testimonial to a favorite Mayor, became the corner-stone of a favorite institution, destined to be cherished always with pride so long as our beloved City endures.

Believe me, dear sir, faithfully yours,

HON. DAVID K. HITCHCOCK.

CHARLES SUMNER.

(8) Hon. Alexander H. Rice also wrote:

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

WASHINGTON, D. C., Jan. 19, 1864.

MY DEAR SIR:

I have just received your letter apprising me of a meeting of the subscribers to the “Bigelow Vase,” to be held at the Tremont House on Thursday next, and

expressing the wish that I might be present. I believe I had not the honor to be one of the subscribers to that fund; but that you will please regard as my misfortune and not fault, as I certainly do. I have often thought of the generous diversion of the fund raised to compliment Mr. Bigelow, to the noble purpose of a great public benefit, as at once an illustrious example of his devotion to the City which he has so often honored, and of the vast advantage that may accrue to a community by the sagacious and unselfish acts of a single citizen arising out of the ordinary courtesies of life.

Doubtless a community like ours would have founded a Free Public Library without this initiation by Mr. Bigelow, but what was not determined, was, by his generosity rendered certain; and perhaps there never was a point of time when the enterprise could have been started with such fortunate results.

I hope the Library may at some time be ornamented by a bust of Mr. Bigelow, in some appropriate niche, and shall be glad to make myself one of the contributors to a fund for that purpose.

Wishing you and the gentlemen with whom you are associated a pleasant reunion,

I am, very faithfully,

Your friend,

HON. SAMUEL D. CRANE.

ALEX. H. RICE.

(9) The City Council's Resolutions of 1869, offered by Alderman Edward A. White, and often referred to in this Reply, which were adopted by a unanimous vote in both branches, are here printed in full:

*"Whereas*, The recent resignation of the Honorable JOHN P. BIGELOW as Trustee of the Public Library is the closing act of a career equally honorable to himself and beneficial to the City, whose interests he has most faithfully served; therefore,

*Resolved*, That the thanks of the City Council of Boston are hereby tendered Mr. Bigelow for his long and arduous public labors, which date back to a very early era in our municipal history, and have been thus recently terminated.

*Resolved*, That in every position which he has been called upon to occupy,—as a member of the Common Council seven years, over which he presided with marked and well-remembered ability,—as Mayor during three years of eventful interest, and as a Trustee of the Public Library from its conception until now, Mr. Bigelow has been diligent, devoted and distinguished, and his services have only been measured by his strength and opportunities.

*Resolved*, That by his earnest and efficient labors during the early part of his mayoralty, for the establishment of a Free City Library, by his application of a fund raised as a personal testimonial to himself to this great object, it being the first money appropriated

for the purpose, and by his exertions in securing the generous aid of two of its earliest and most munificent patrons, he has well earned the title of the Founder of the Public Library of the City of Boston, and as such he must always be recognized, respected and remembered."

(10) In July, 1872, the same Resolutions, as is well-known, were reaffirmed, with this added Resolve, offered by Alderman Clark:

"*Resolved*, The City Council of 1872, on receiving the intelligence of the death of the Honorable JOHN PRESCOTT BIGELOW, who was Mayor of this City in 1849, 1850 and 1851, desires to place upon its records the expression of respect for the ability and energy exhibited by Mr. Bigelow on all occasions, both ordinary and extraordinary, which occurred during his term of service; and especially in this day of its success, the City Council gratefully remembers and recognizes the valuable and timely aid which he rendered in the early days of the establishment of the Public Library of the City of Boston, as appears from the records of the City Council, dated January 29, 1869."

The Resolution of Alderman Clark was unanimously passed by a rising vote.

(11) Mayor Prince, in his Inaugural Address for 1880, thus speaks of Mr. Bigelow:—

"In 1850, that excellent man, patriotic citizen, and upright magistrate, John P. Bigelow, gave the first moneys donated to the Boston Public Library. The sum of \$1,000 had been subscribed by his friends as a testimonial of his personal worth, but he directed its application to the Library. This generous act, and his earnest and efficient labors during the early part of his mayoralty, in establishing this institution, and obtaining the aid of two of its earliest and most munificent patrons, has well earned for him the title of the Founder of the Public Library of the City of Boston, and as such to be always recognized, respected and remembered."

If all these recited facts and testimony do not establish the claims of Mr. Bigelow to the honors deemed his due, — what can? He was modest in asserting those claims in life, permitting his works to speak for him; but, until some municipal Thomas H. Benton shall appear, "solitary and alone to set the ball in motion,"

for expunging the City Resolutions as they are recorded in Mr. Bigelow's favor, and, also, for obliterating all the varied testimonies in his behalf from other sources, and from the place which he holds in the hearts of those who knew him on earth,—he must be regarded by his gift of one thousand dollars, and by official and other acts, as the Founder of the Boston Public Library.

I trust that the charge of nepotism will not be alleged against me, because I have written this paper in defence of a kinsman whom I honor and loved. Since while it was my painful duty, a month since, to sit and listen to what must have been designed as an annihilation of every lurking vestige or memory of a once popular magistrate and magnate, so far as concerned one of his great life-honors, it is a privilege which I pleasurably avail myself of to reply thereto, as well and fully as strength and opportunity will admit.

Many have left the throngs of life who might have written in behalf of Mr. Bigelow's claims far more understandingly than I have done, having a broader basis of facts, or personal experience, to discourse from. Mr. Bigelow, himself, if alive, could have supplied ample *data* from which to vindicate his honors, and illustrate his labors, during the morning days of the Public Library, by which his proper *status*, in that respect, could be made good. Mr. Prescott Bigelow would have known no weariness until his Father's just rights had been established, and his magnanimity and self denial in making the Bigelow Library Donation were asserted for all time. Col. T. Bigelow Lawrence, who loved and prized an Uncle, whose own love for, and loyalty to, himself fairly blazed—as previously intimated—when his very heart and soul were seemingly on trial before the world, would have spared no labor or expense in replying to the sage of Newport, as he deserves to be answered and silenced. While Hon. N. B. Shurtleff, “who had perfect understanding of all things from the very first,” pertaining to John P. Bigelow's fatherhood of the Library, would not have rested until the last fact had been brought to light, and the last stone put in place, which belongs to the monument commemorative of Mr. Bigelow's modestly asserted honors regarding the birth-hours of our City Library. And I will add that I have missed and mourned my own beloved Father, whose memory of facts and dates was at all times worthy of Samuel Pepys, or Dr. John Pierce, and whose scrupulously accurate daily diaries have been of great service

to me in treading the labyrinth of thirty years ago, to which I have been suddenly summoned, at the rude behest of Francis Brinley.

But other and abler defenders of John P. Bigelow being, by God's providence, speechless, it has fallen to me, in the midst of bodily infirmity, to write what I have done in my Uncle's behalf. And however imperfect this paper may be, it has the distinction of having been prepared with a sole regard for simple facts and solid truth; and if what I have thus communicated be weak and unsatisfactory, because of personal short comings, yet despite of this — the honors of John P. Bigelow, as the true Founder of our Public Library, are as strong and deep laid as the very corner-stone of the Channing Memorial Church, near which the communication, to which this is a reply, was written. And while it may seem a trivial matter to dwell upon the first thousand-dollar donation to an institution, in behalf of which the City Treasury now expends, annually, more than one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, yet, the experience of travellers in all climes and times assures us that it is not uninteresting, nor unworthy the contemplation of great and studious minds, to seek among the Rocky Mountains, the Himalayas and the Andes, the head waters of the Missouri, the Ganges and the Amazon. And my last word is, that Mr. Bigelow's claims to distinction, in connection with the origin of the Boston Public Library, rest upon too broad, too strong, too historic a basis to be successfully assailed, or truthfully controverted, at this late day, by obtuse memories, fossilized prejudices, rusty rancor, and a fabulous thirty-year-old — whisper!

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#### NOTE.

Since the foregoing Reply was read, an editorial appeared in the Boston Journal (May 14), which states: "Some years ago, when Mayor Bigelow was in office, a few zealous friends held a meeting in Faneuil Hall, and brought him out as a candidate for Governor. The effort was not successful, but his services, as Mayor, seemed entitled to recognition, and a subscription was opened, and *about a thousand* dollars raised." This says, by implication, or inuendo, that the proposed gift to Mr. Bigelow was because of the non-success of the Faneuil Hall meeting. The statement is not worthy of



